

THE COUNTERFORCE

hardcore punk underground

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What is this? **The Counterforce** is an initiative to push back against the corporate capture of hardcore punk. Social media apps and streaming platforms dominate how we interact online, including how we share and distribute our music and ideas. The corporations that run these platforms extract massive profits from us, which they use to fund and facilitate exploitation, war, and genocide. Meanwhile, our independent and underground alternatives have eroded.

The goal of The Counterforce is to strengthen and grow the hardcore punk underground that still exists outside of this corporate capture. Rather than funnel punk into profit-driven walled gardens, we want to foment and encourage a culture that is autonomous and independent. This is not just a nostalgic, backward-facing project — we want to explore new alternatives for spreading hardcore punk online and offline.

You are reading issue #1 of the print version of The Counterforce. Find the files to print and distribute this zine (and eventually others like it) yourself online at <https://the-counterforce.org>

There, you will also find:

A WEB ZINE

This site publishes reviews, letters, scene reports, profiles/interviews, rants, and how-to guides, all with an emphasis on projects that try to exist outside of corporate platforms.

In part, we hope this will encourage human-driven curation, recommendation, and discovery. Find out about new bands that aren't on the streaming sites. Submit a review of your own band. Compile a scene report or show review and send it in. We also publish articles and DIY how-to guides to help empower other punks to build and participate in a scene that's less centered around evil apps.

All this is published online, but also compiled into regular print zine editions to bring paper back to the punk show (like the version you are reading now).

A DIRECTORY OF SIMILARLY ALIGNED PROJECTS

The Internet is breaking down. Websites outside of a handful of apps have slowly disappeared, and the ones that are still out there are harder and harder to find.

The Counterforce provides a directory of these websites: blogs, archives, distros, zines, radio shows and podcasts... anywhere hardcore punk can be found online (and maybe offline too!).



THE COUNTERFORCE IS A DISTRIBUTED AND COMMUNITY PROJECT

Get in touch if you want to submit!

Scene reports, interviews/profiles, zine/show/record reviews, how to guides. All pitches are welcome. Submission does not guarantee publication.

Web: <https://the-counterforce.org>

E-mail: the-counterforce@riseup.net

Mastodon: [@The_Counterforce@kolektiva.social](https://mstdn.social/@The_Counterforce)

PRINT THIS ZINE

This zine is available on our website as a PDF you can print out and distribute yourself, with more coming soon.

Overzealous purity fanatics who are quick to call someone out for a single transgression should be ignored. Rather than focus on individual “purity,” this is a mutual effort to keep hardcore punk a transgressive and progressive force in the world, and a place where we experiment with better ways to do things. We are not trying to kick someone out of punk for playing one Live Nation show or one Vans-sponsored fest. We just need to tip the scales against the trend of selling out.

EXPAND THE ZONE

By simply building and maintaining an alternative culture based on better ideals and principles, we are contributing to positive change in the world by being a proving ground for potential new worlds. But we *must go further* — our network and subculture is not just a prototype, but a source of power from which we can act politically for change in the broader world right now. We can raise awareness, we can raise money, we can move people. When shit goes down, our friend networks can become organizing networks. We’re learning how to operate a music scene on principles of mutual aid and in resistance to capitalism, and we can apply this knowledge to how we organize with our neighbors and communities. Rather than bring capitalism in, turning our little roles in hardcore punk into more jobs, we should expand out and push to dismantle the system that requires us all to slave in shitty jobs in the first place.

PUNK NEVER DIED, YOU JUST SOLD OUT

There are lots of podcasts hosted by older punks in their 40s or 50s. They often end up remarking how “different” things are in the scene now, compared to when they came up. From their perspective, hardcore punk used to be DIY and underground: everyone booked their own shows and put out their own records. It was all done for fun and gas money with little ambition to sign to a major label or do music “professionally.” Nowadays, according to them, it’s a totally different world. The underground is gone and hardcore punk is just another mainstream genre of Heavy Music. Everyone works within the industry, has booking agents, regularly plays big sponsored fests, runs a business, wins music awards, and hustles for streams. Hardcore punk is a career choice.

These podcast hosts are really talking about how *they’ve* changed, without any self-awareness. Overtime, their bands became indie rock bands and they sold out. They exited the underground and stopped paying attention to it. Despite often being prolific record collectors and self-proclaimed punk “historians” they are completely clueless about the state of current underground hardcore punk. They are unaware that incredible bands are still booking their own tours, self-releasing demo tapes and objectively good records, and playing in basements and small venues for gas money. These guys assume hardcore punk stopped when they stopped doing it.

It seems like willful ignorance. Rather than admit they compromised their values and sold out, they prefer to pretend that “the world changed, man” and that a vibrant underground hardcore punk scene no longer exists. What a cop out!

Perspectives like this also come from people who aren’t as disconnected as dusty old podcast dudes. People who should know better will say things like “the underground doesn’t exist anymore.” More common is a middling, defeatist attitude: the underground still exists, but there’s no point in trying to resist corporate capture. Corporate platforms are already too dominant, it’s too late to resist them, and there are no alternatives. This is also a cop out, a narrative that makes it easy for people to accept the inevitability of dystopia rather than try to personally hold onto values that could bring us to a better world.

The world *has* changed, it’s true. Streaming and social media have both grown as technologies and “heavy music” is in fashion again as a marketable product. But true underground hardcore punk still exists today, and it *always will* to some extent. There will always be punks hiding from the mainstream in basements, on cassettes, in the pages of photocopied zines, and in the hidden corners of the Internet. The Counterforce is everywhere.

What isn’t certain is how expansive and radical this underground will be. We can accept the increasing corporate capture and recuperation of hardcore punk as inevitable and, like the podcasters, tell ourselves that “the underground is dead” so we don’t feel as bad about selling out. Or... ☹

A PLACE TO EXPERIMENT WITH AND LEARN ABOUT ALTERNATIVES

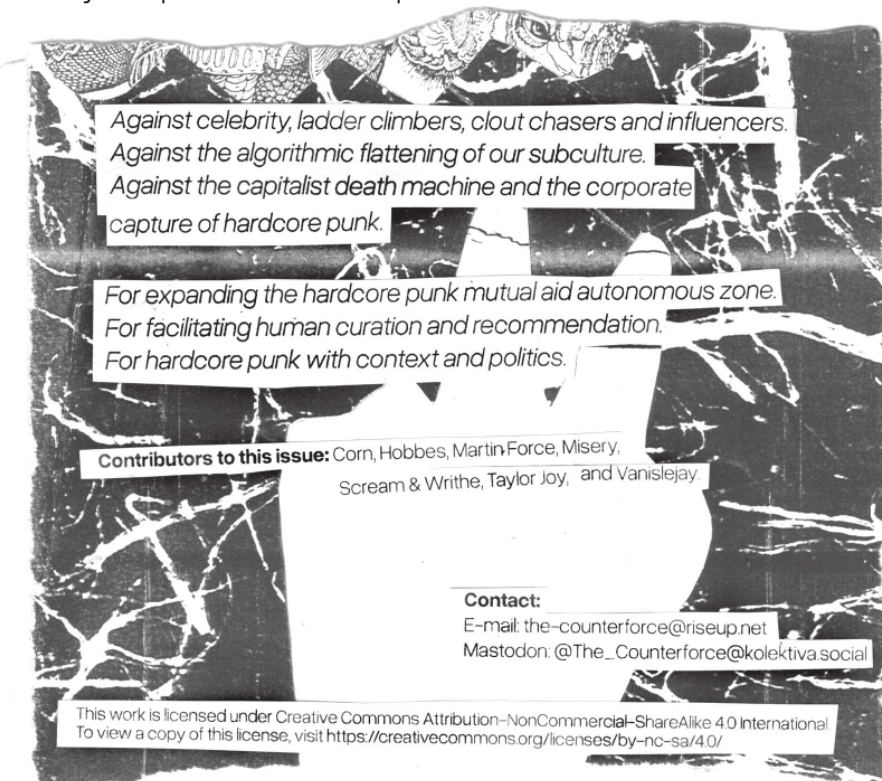
It’s easy to shit on the corporate social media and streaming platforms, but what other options are there? There are alternatives and we try them out — public online show calendars, open-source social media, self-hosted music sharing — and encourage other punks to join us.

A DIGITAL ZINE DISTRO

Major punk fanzines of the past fell victim to the rising costs of printing and shipping. We publish printable PDFs of our zines online for anyone to print and distribute themselves, and encourage other zinesters to submit their own. What if instead of shipping zines around the world, any punk anywhere could log on, download some PDFs and scam some copies to have a fully stocked, PWYC zine distro at the next show? Print-It-Yourself!

A HARD LINE AGAINST CONTRIBUTING TO FURTHER CORPORATE CAPTURE OF OUR SUBCULTURE

- No links to Instagram, Spotify, Linktree, Discord, or other corporate platforms.
- No coverage of releases that are on major labels, or only available digitally on corporate streaming platforms.
- Always independent and not-for-profit.



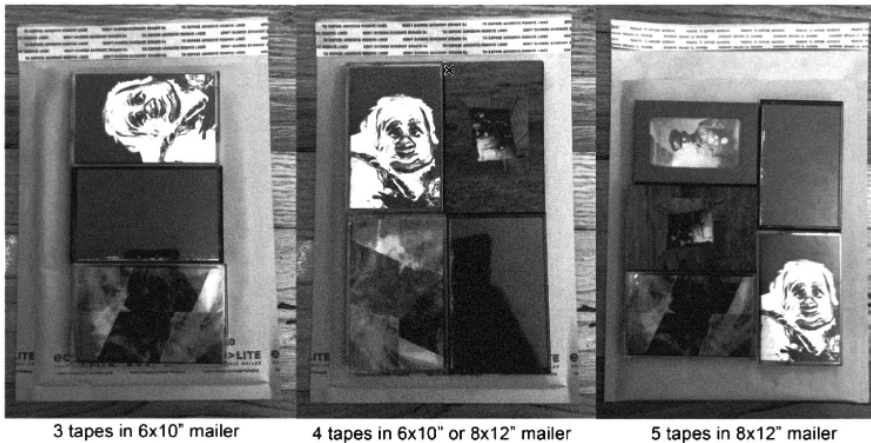
HOW TO SHIP TAPES (AND MORE) FOR CHEAP WITHIN CANADA

A Lettermail primer presented by Scream & Writhe, first published 12/9/23 and revised and submitted to The Counterforce 5/17/24.

Lettermail continues to be a somewhat overlooked option for shipping tapes, CDs, and other similar sized items. This information will prove useful to many who have been unnecessarily burned by double-digit parcel shipping rates.

The main determining factor for Lettermail is the package dimensions.

This is the most important thing to be mindful of. There is wiggle room with the max length and width being just shy of 27x38cm (10.6x14.9"), but the max thickness for shipping via Lettermail is just a hair over **2cm**, and this is where people often run into trouble: 2cm happens to be the exact thickness of a tape in a standard norelco case. This means that once a tape is inside a bubble mailer **nothing else can be added on top**, and if you are shipping 2 or more tapes they must be **laying flat**, side by side, not stacked on top of each other. If you exceed the 2cm limit in any way, even just by adding a card or some stickers, for example, you may be charged parcel rates.



Pick a suitable mailer. Standard 6x10" bubble mailers can hold 1–3 tapes (sometimes 4 if the internal width is on your side). 8x12" bubble mailers can hold 4–5 tapes. See examples below.

Some postal clerks can be very strict about this as your package may not easily pass through the slot in their measurement tool even if you've packed it properly. They might try to say that your package can't be shipped via Lettermail. In this case you can say that you're willing to take the risk and have

Fuck the algorithms! We have to stop accepting so much profit-maximizing recommendation that flattens our culture. We need more human-curated recommendation and accessible spaces where it can happen: more blogs, zines, reviews, scene reports, interviews, and radio shows/podcasts. And we need social media that is an actual *social* network instead of a login-walled algorithm-mediated advertising machine, so we can openly share music we are making and digging with each other.

MONEY CHANGES EVERYTHING

The rise in popularity of corporate social media and streaming in hardcore punk has been accompanied by an increasing acceptance of more general capitalist tendencies. There are more unquestioned sponsorships, bands playing massive festivals with corporate backers, major label behavior, a proliferation of managers, agents, and middlemen, and more unchallenged grabs for profit. This is a bad trend! We should continue to practice the long tradition of defending hardcore punk against those who seek to recuperate our culture into the capitalist system.

STOP SELLING OUT

Participation in hardcore punk, whether it's playing in a band, booking shows, running a space, taking photos, or making zines, is always met with awesome support. The temptation to transfer that success into a paying job is understandable and it makes sense to seek out a job based on skills or talents you've developed here. We all have to survive under capitalism, we all need a job. The problem is when people try to turn hardcore punk itself *into a job*, degrading our mutual aid-based relationships into transactional ones.

This erodes the radical spaces and networks (the *autonomous zone*) we've built by helping it all be absorbed by capitalism. We will not defeat capitalism with *more capitalism*. Even if you have a cool "punk job," nothing stops you from continuing to participate and contribute to hardcore punk on the mutual aid, not-for-profit level. Fuck running your band like a business, fuck people who use hardcore punk as a stepping stone for their career, and fuck corporate venues, corporate sponsors, professional promoters and all intermediary agents who take a cut.

A BALANCE OF GATEKEEPING IS NECESSARY

Gatekeeping is not a dirty word. Some gatekeeping is OK and good, actually; it's a balance. Singers on stage have been heard to say things like: "Everyone is welcome at this show" — actually no. The following people are *not welcome*: cops, landlords, racists, rapists, grifters, profit-seekers, sellouts, exploiters, and posers. Those who prove themselves time and time again to be more interested in profiting, selling out, or collaborating with corporate interests, should be mocked, shamed, and excluded. A little gatekeeping insulates us from this corruption.

And yes, if something is truly underground and against the dominant culture, it will be inherently a little harder to find. This is a feature, not a bug. That said, our shows should **not** be private parties — fuck that. Our subculture should be *obscure*, but *accessible*. We shouldn't close the gate to those who are already marginalized by prevalent systems of domination and hierarchy. To do this effectively, we have to understand and counteract the systems of oppression and domination in the mainstream world. We have to ensure we are working against forces like gentrification and colonialism, not perpetuating them. Keep punk from becoming a rich white boys club. Strive to make shows affordable, PWYC, NOTAFLOP. Encourage and provide opportunities for those who can't pay to contribute in other ways, like helping out with the show. If they can't contribute at all, then still *let them in*. Try to keep show spaces physically accessible to wheelchair users. Try to keep shows on-time and early to accommodate people who are stuck with a shitty job in the morning they can't afford to miss. Shows don't have to be listed in the newspaper, but they should be promoted to anyone who knows where to look, not exclusively to anyone with a fucking *Instagram account*.

NO PURITY CULTURE

Gatekeeping and sellout-shaming is needed, but this isn't all about cultivating a purity culture. It's ok to enjoy and participate in things besides hardcore punk. Enjoy pop radio (we do). Start a rock band to get signed and pay your bills (just stay in your lane). Being part of this subculture should not mean being 100% "pure" in all parts of life. We all make compromises under capitalism and have other hobbies and interests and identities. This is uncontroversial.

that are less evil and corrupt. Doing so will help us maintain our autonomy so companies like Spotify can't just pull the rug out from under us when they are the only option left to share music online.

2. EXPLORE AND BUILD ONLINE ALTERNATIVES

Rather than being reactionary, advocating for some nostalgic return to “the ways things used to be,” we *should* explore new technology and changes in digital culture. Social media and the Internet can be great, liberating tools that connect us over long distances, across borders and in spite of physical or mental barriers to accessibility. We just have to find and build alternatives that are divorced from corporate interests and control.

Much like hardcore punk, the Internet itself has a liberatory subculture that has been eroded by corporate capture. And it also has a counterforce pushing back against this erosion. There is a sprawling underground of open-source, non-profit, community-driven tools, protocols, and networks that provide alternatives to corporate social media and streaming platforms. These alternatives are free and open instead of closed and profit-driven. They are not addictive-by-design, nor riddled with ads, nor spying on us and selling our data.

Federated social media (e.g. Mastodon, Pixelfed and the Fediverse), public show calendars (Gancio), small websites and blogs (e.g. neocities.org, blogspot.com — yes Blogspot still exists!), RSS feeds and podcasts, self-hosted and alternative music sharing (e.g. Faircamp, PeerTube, Mirlo), and free, open libraries and archives (e.g. The Internet Archive)... these are just a few examples!

Some of these are old and familiar and could do with a revival. Some are novel and breaking new ground online. All of them DIY, requiring some knowledge and effort, but in the long term they help fortify our autonomy and independence. With a little bit of work, we can have social media without addictive algorithms and advertising, accessible online show listings, and online music streaming that we control.

3. MORE PAPER AT SHOWS

We advocate for online alternatives because we recognize the Internet and smart phones and digital media aren't going away. But the online world

will always be easier for corporations to capture and control so we make a plea for offline culture as well. Hasn't punk always been a little Luddite and nostalgic?

We want more paper at shows. Make physical handbills and hand them out. Start or contribute to a local fanzine. Bring a zine distro to shows, and check one out if it already exists in your town. When a stranger hands you a flyer at a show it is a blessing. Cherish it.

Distribution and reach of paper zines has been crippled by increased shipping and printing costs. If our goal in making fanzines is primarily to spread our ideas, opinions and recommendations, we should make them freely available. Anyone should be able to get the master files for punk fanzines, print them out, and distribute them locally. Anarchists already employ this Print-It-Yourself approach to facilitate the proliferation of zine distros everywhere. We should adopt this strategy to help our zines spread, and encourage offline interaction and engagement with our music and ideas.

4. YOU CAN STILL LOOK AT INSTAGRAM, OK?

We don't all need to quit overnight. It's fine to keep listening to Spotify and posting on Instagram. But we should shift the center of our focus away from these corporate platforms: invest in and **prioritize** alternatives! Share your show on the local punk calendar *before* posting it on Instagram. Make sure your demo is available somewhere online besides Spotify. Every action helps, big or small.

People are more willing to use and build alternatives once they are demystified. We need to proliferate knowledge and guides about these alternatives — the DIY ethic will take care of the rest. We also need to be encouraging and persistent. There can be a hump to overcome in trying alternatives because they lack the massive resources and addictive design of corporate platforms. Anything new and different can seem a lot more complicated, and sometimes it is (although corporate social media can have a steep learning curve too, it's just easy to forget). It takes some enthusiasm and dedication to overcome this hump. We need to be understanding and patient with our friends.

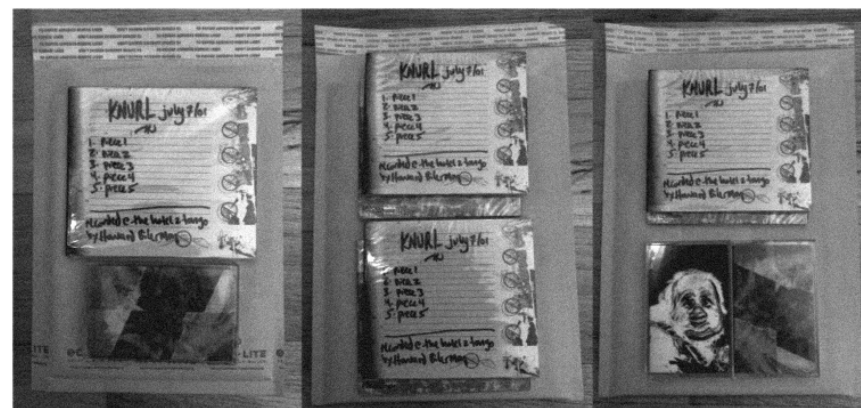
5. HUMAN CURATION OVER ALGORITHMIC RECOMMENDATION

them send it anyways, saying that you understand that the package may be returned to you and you'll have to pay to ship it again (if you've packed properly this won't happen and the package will be delivered without issue). Worst case, you also have the option of trying again when someone else is working, or trying another post office where the staff may be more receptive (many do know the score by this point).

The final cost will be determined by the package weight, which maxes out at 500g. After tax it will be just over \$2 on the lower end (1 tape or CD) and closer to \$7 on the higher end (a small book). The prices increase slightly every now and then (thankfully not annually like the rest of Canada Post's rates), so it's best to check the Canada Post website for their non-standard and oversize mail postage stamp rates to keep up to date. Current costs after May 2024 increase: up to 100g (1 tape): **\$2.09**, up to 200g (2–3 tapes): **\$3.43**, up to 300g (4–5 tapes): **\$4.78**, up to 400g: **\$5.48**, and up to 500g: **\$5.89**, plus tax. Unlike parcel rates, which vary widely based on location and destination, these blanket prices are valid when shipping to/from any point in Canada.

Beyond tapes, Lettermail can also be used for: 1–4 CDs in a bubble mailer (2 digipaks cross-stacked remain under the limit. As do 4 ecopaks, meaning you could technically* attempt to ship 8 ecopaks in two cross-stacks of 4 in an 8x12" mailer. Standard jewel cases are thicker, you will only be able to get 1 in a 6x10" mailer, or 2 side by side in an 8x12" mailer), a combination of tapes and CDs (i.e. 1 tape and 1 CD, side by side), zines or small books (you may want to allow room for cardboard to prevent bending), 1–5 7"s (depending on thickness, either in a 7" mailer or between two pieces of cardboard in a bubble mailer).

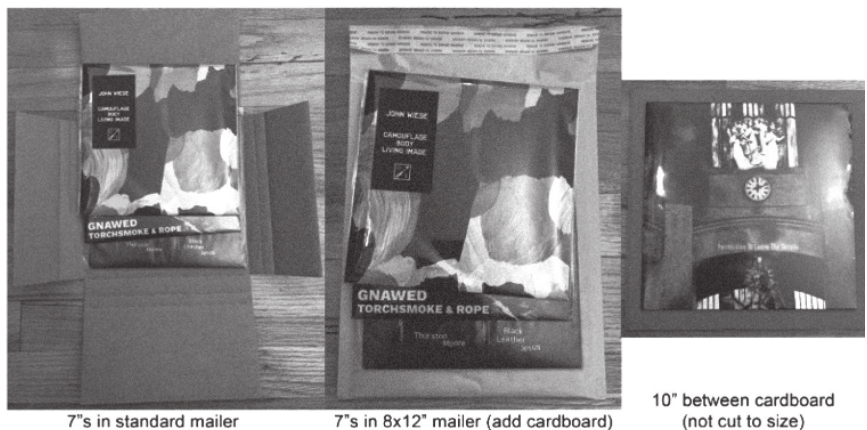
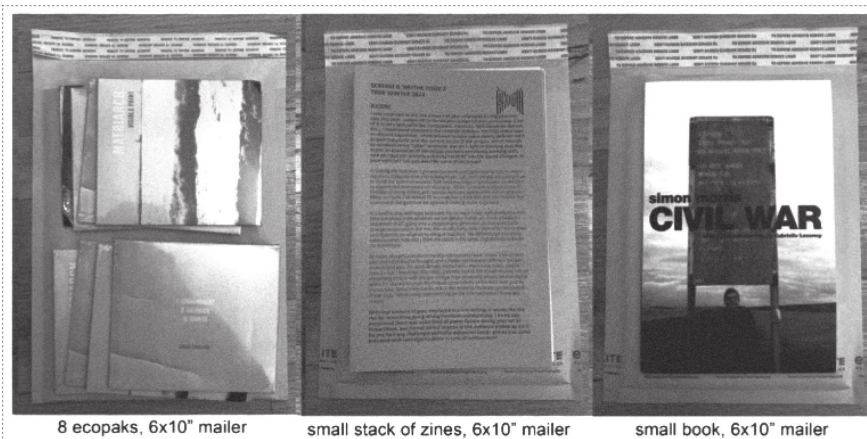
**Things will move around in transit, and what may be stacked nicely when first shipping out will likely turn into an oversized jumble by the time it hits the sorting facility and could be returned to you. When placing CDs side by side it's best to also insert a piece of cardboard to keep the package flat and prevent this kind of slippage.*



1 tape + 1 CD, 6x10" mailer

4 digipak CDs, 8x12" mailer

2 tapes + 2 digipaks, 8x12" mailer



In the last figure you will notice that even a single 10" record can be shipped via Lettermail by cutting two pieces of sturdy cardboard down to size, ensuring that it will be under both the max weight and the max dimensions. Still other combinations are possible, as long as you don't break the 2cm limit, keep the other dimensions within 27x38cm, and the weight under 500g. Get creative!

Lettermail does not include tracking and delivery generally takes a week or more, depending on the location (Canada Post advertises 4 business days for out of province delivery, though this is a very generous estimate). It's rare for Canada Post to lose a package (though it can happen, even with a tracked parcel). If tracking and insurance are what you need, it is worth signing up for a free Canada Post Small Business account. Having an account gets you minor shipping discounts (does not apply to Lettermail), with the added benefit of being able to ship Expedited packages with tracking and insurance (up to \$100) for the cost of Regular packages. As a bonus, Canada Post allows Small Business accounts to ship one domestic package for free (up to 5kg) every Tuesday in October. </end of endorsement> 📧

THE COUNTERFORCE

We need to stop prioritizing corporate social media as the online hub of our subculture. We need to reverse the trend of sharing our music on corporate streaming sites. Many of us are seeking relief from the endless doomscroll and attention-hogging of apps like Instagram and TikTok, or are frustrated with the cost, restrictions and algorithmic whims of Spotify. We need to reconfigure our subculture so these corporate platforms are not so central.

We should promote tried-and-true offline practices, like print zines, cassette demos, and paper flyers, but we also have to accept that the Internet has irreversibly changed how people connect. How many "print-only" zines still have an account on corporate social media? We can't simply revive offline strategies of spreading hardcore punk without addressing today's internet-connected world. We must intervene in both on- and offline spaces.

Anyone who tries to participate in hardcore punk without resorting to using online corporate platforms knows it is both isolating and extremely challenging. FOMO is real. We can't just complain, we need to provide and promote alternatives to encourage and support anyone trying to resist their dominance. The more of us who refuse to prioritize them, the less powerful they are.

In the service of these goals, The Counterforce pursues the following strategies:

1. DE-CENTER CORPORATE STREAMING

MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL's print magazine ended in 2019. They had a longstanding editorial policy to not cover music released on major labels:

"No major labels or labels exclusively distributed by major-owned distros".

This was a good thing! MRR was influential and widely read, and their policy on major-label releases held back corporate encroachment for a long time. In response to the changing music distribution landscape, one of their last issues (#419) featured a provocative April Fool's joke on the back cover:



This was a prank, but... what if it had been serious? It's kind of inspirational. What if there really was a huge international hardcore punk zine that only covers bands who refuse to put their music on corporate streaming platforms? Sure, some good bands would be overlooked, but all the posers, grifters and wannabe sell-outs would be omitted. If this had been a real change in MRR policy rather than a prank, who knows where we'd be today.

Corporate streaming platforms like Spotify are equivalent to major-owned distros. They are fully integrated into the capitalist industrial media complex. For the most part, the only way to get your music onto these platforms is to sign a licensing agreement with a digital distributor who charges a fee and/or takes a cut of the royalties (and it's well known that this is at worst basically nothing, and at best a shitty deal for you). Putting your band through this process draws you into business as usual, just like signing with a major label used to: legal legitimacy, government taxes, fees, licensing agreements, your legal names on everything, etc. It encourages bands to move forward running things like a business, and businesses care about profits.

MRR had the right idea. We should point the spotlight away from bands that have bought into the major labels' system and recognize that platforms like Spotify are now part of this system. We don't have to embargo every release that happens to be on Spotify, but we should strive to prioritize other ways of sharing and listening to our music online



The ongoing Rohingya genocide, greatly driven by Facebook

Where do all their profits go? To Joe Rogan, to Swedish billionaires who invest in defense companies, to Mark Zuckerberg and Meta to facilitate genocides. These companies and the people who own them are among the richest in the world. They fund wars, they degrade the information ecosystem, they lobby governments to promote their own interests. Not only are their products bad for us, they profit off us and direct those profits to actively making our world worse.

They also work hand in hand with governments, police, and warmongers: they censor and remove content, they happily hand over user information to police, and they contribute to the expanding surveillance of populations. It's foolish to think any meaningful social change will come from organizing on the platforms operated and controlled by the corrupt people and institutions in power.

It is understandable why these platforms are so popular. They are slick, addictive, and often "free" (when your data and attention are the real products). They provide an easy way to share and listen to music... and maybe your song will even get added to a hype playlist. All your friends and social activity is happening there... and maybe you can go viral and gain thousands of followers.

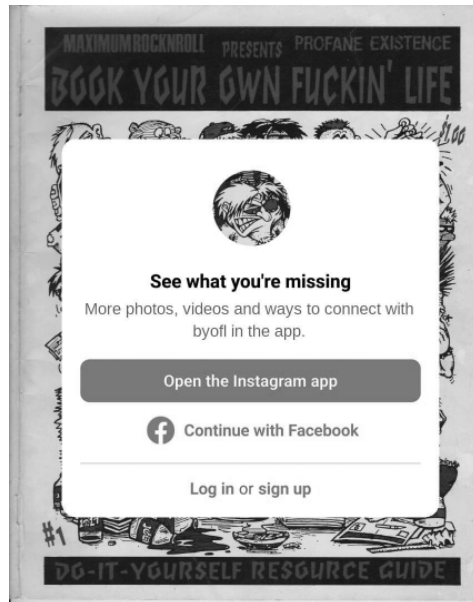
Many participants of the hardcore punk subculture have completely bought into these platforms. They are the highly prioritized, if not exclusive, means to chat, share music, post flyers, talk about shows, find new bands, and meet new friends. Forget trying to book a tour without an account — the modern-day "Book Your Own Fuckin' Life" is a list of Instagram handles.

The more we prioritize these platforms, the more we strengthen their monopolies and erode our autonomous zone, our ability to build alternatives and survive the coming struggles. The more we

buy into corporate walled gardens, the more we exclude anyone who isn't willing to use corporate media on principle, anyone who doesn't want to trade their data and attention for an account, or anyone who just can't for the sake of their mental health.

Our increased use of and dependence on these platforms has been accompanied by a broader corporate capture of our subculture. It's not surprising that normalized use of algorithm-directed profit-driven advertising platforms has normalized more capitalist behaviour in general. It has drawn us all away from the principle of mutual aid and further into the machinery of capitalism.

This corporate capture of hardcore punk defangs it. Working towards individual profit in a system of domination and exploitation undermines the principles this subculture is based on. This is why *selling out* has always garnered shame and mockery. The best hardcore punk has always been underground. It cannot thrive when it has been captured and recuperated as mainstream "heavy music." An underground, illegal generator show is *always* going to be more transgressive, more politically interesting and more **fun** than a sterilized, sponsored, corporate show at a legitimate venue. Anyone who believes otherwise is lying to themselves, or has forgotten what true underground hardcore punk is like (or just never really knew).



INTRO TO LA CHAÎNE

By Taylor Joy

La Chaîne is a monthly-ish newsletter/infolettre that is printed and distributed in Montreal since 2022. It's been running steady for a year and a half now and has become a staple in every kitchen/bathroom in town. Printed on a single double-sided 8.5x14 sheet of paper, La Chaîne is big and colourful and hard to miss on the door table at a show. Here, Taylor (the mind behind La Chaîne), puts down some of her thoughts on starting and running the project for over a year.

THE IDEA FOR LA CHAÎNE

Around 2018–2019, Montreal DIY had asked me to design and print a few of their monthly physical show listing calendars. I'd always really appreciated that project making show listings available because if you're not on Instagram or Facebook (which I'm not), you can't really see events, stories, posts, etc, so it's pretty hard to find info about shows. As someone who benefited from the listings being compiled, I was super happy to contribute to getting that show info out into the world. I was going through kind of a stressful period in my life and getting to do a really fun and low-stakes creative project was really nice.



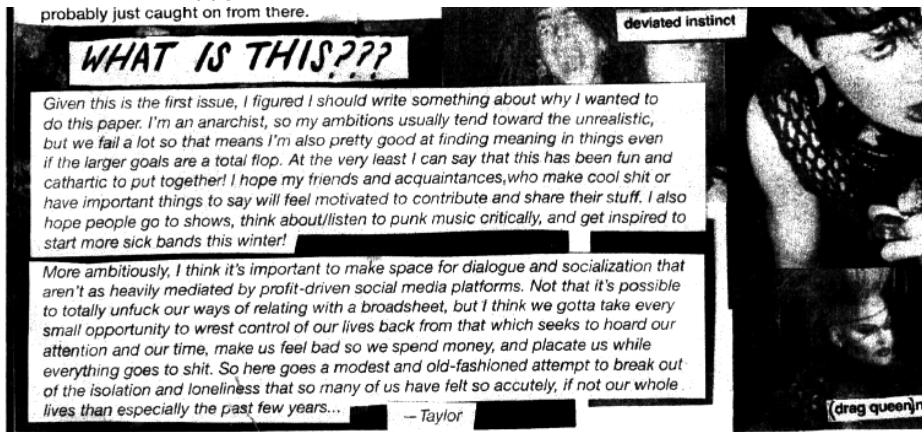
Montreal DIY show calendars, 2018–2019

There was a period where I designed the show calendar a few months in a row, and I started kicking around the idea that it would be funny to do a punk broadsheet newsletter on the back, with scene news, reviews, classifieds, etc. When the pandemic hit, there obviously weren't a lot of shows, so the degree to which subcultures like punk and hardcore (as well as people's entire social lives) existed on social media really accelerated. I came out of that period with a lot of energy and a renewed urgency for doing something really tangible and DIY, that might help migrate some of the content of the scene and our lives back off of Instagram and other platforms and back into our own hands.

THE FIRST ISSUE

I put out the first issue in October 2022 — it's kind of silly, and looks really different from the subsequent issues. The period between when I decided it was "go time" for the project and when I put out the first issue was really short, just a few weeks. I didn't want to overthink it, I knew if I tried to figure out too much stuff beforehand I would stall out and maybe it wouldn't happen — I got the first issue out, and knew I would figure out the rest as I went.

Here's the scrappy "manifesto" I wrote in the first issue probably just caught on from there.



I called it "La Chaîne" because I wanted it to sound cool and be roughly bilingual. "Chaîne" also has multiple meanings in french — it's not only a physical chain with links (like the meaning in english), but it can also mean channel (e.g., s'abonner à une chaîne YouTube = subscribe to a YouTube channel).

DESIGN AND PRINT

I'm a big nerd about typography and design and layout and I do graphic design work sometimes, but *La Chaîne* is not my job, it's my fun punk project where I get to fuck off a bit. So I keep it really simple and mostly stick to a template — I never want a creative block to be the thing that stops me from getting an issue out, and getting enough content for an issue is already challenging enough. When I do have excess energy or inspiration during issue assembly, I can channel it into illustrations and custom lettering, or doing fun things with the colour layers.



Large two-colour illustration in #17, April 2024

MANIFESTO FOR THE COUNTERFORCE

HARDCORE PUNK AS A MUTUAL AID-BASED AUTONOMOUS ZONE

The hardcore punk subculture consists of people, bands, spaces and projects that perpetuate an internationally distributed **autonomous zone**. It is *underground*, existing outside the media mainstream of capitalism. Entities within this zone — bands, zines, distributors, promoters, labels, etc. — follow a largely not-for-profit, DIY (Do It Yourself) ethic to achieve common goals, either on the micro level (pulling off a show) or a macro level (the perpetuation of the subculture itself). Individual participants voluntarily contribute what they can in a cooperative and reciprocal way. This subculture is a manifestation of **mutual aid**, and it exists, to a great extent, as a radical alternative to the dominant capitalist culture.

The term "mutual aid" gets thrown around a lot these days, often to describe an anarchist-informed organizing model used by projects like Food Not Bombs or disaster relief community groups. But mutual aid is a relatively simple, anarchist concept that is observed throughout human and non-human-animal history. Mutual aid is the practice of individuals voluntarily coming together to meet common needs of their community in cooperative and reciprocal ways. This practice is powerful and liberatory, because it is non-hierarchical, non-transactional, and doesn't involve authorities or states.



Mutual Aid by N.O. BONZO

THE CAPTURE OF HARDCORE PUNK BY CORPORATE PLATFORMS

Corporate social media, streaming platforms, and similar apps have steadily increased their capture of hardcore punk subculture to the point where they now mediate much of our social lives and interactions.

These corporate platforms are profit-driven. They collect your data and attention to sell, or charge you subscription fees, or both. To maximize profit, they are intentionally designed to be frictionless, slick, and addictive. They build monopolies so that when no viable competition or alternatives exist, they can change the deal by increasing their fees and degrading their "services."

They use opaque recommendation algorithms to feed us content, and this too is done solely to maximize profit — not to curate a vibrant, diverse, and challenging hardcore punk subculture. As an extreme side effect, we see bands orienting their image, song writing, and production (either consciously or subconsciously) to appease these algorithms. Behold: *Spotify Hardcore*. Algorithmic recommendation flattens out the sound of hardcore punk into just another easy-to-digest pop sub-genre.

To build their user bases towards monopoly, these platforms are walled gardens. Instagram hits non-users trying to view a post with a login wall, while Spotify playlists can only include songs on Spotify and can only be enjoyed by someone with a Spotify account. They leverage the *network* effect into a positive feedback loop to solidify their dominance: "everyone" is there, so everyone else wants to be there. Obviously they are hostile to anyone who doesn't want to sell out and sign up. The more tricks they can use to lure and trap new users inside their isolated silos, the more profit they can extract.

SØRDID - "Reality's A War"

by Misery

Dripping with fuzz, noise and static, Brooklyn's SØRDID is back in full force. 5 tracks of self described d-beat raw punk that last's just over 3 blistering minutes, as it should be! Don't be fooled by the washed out sample on the first track, by the 20 second mark "PODRIDOS" takes no time to blast us with delayed and distorted vocals, crunchy bass, pounding drums and borderline indecipherable guitar riffs. "SUBSTANCE" crashes into an almost dark punk stomp that's sure to get the beer cans flying. The vocals are oozing with delay, but still present enough that you can easily shout along to the titular track "REALITY'S A WAR" and the blistering closer "MUTANT". No shortage of guttural shrieks or mahiactal laughter here, this is raw punk to grab your closest friend by the jacket and drag them across the pit to.

FFO: TOWER 7, 80HD, NECRON 9

Listen via RoachLeg Records here
7" available thru imitate human

<https://roachlegrecords.bandcamp.com/album/sordid-realitys-a-war>



VISIONS OF CHAOS - "Never-ending Shit Happens..."

by Misery

Berlin/Athens two piece VISIONS OF CHAOS are back with more blown out, fuzzed up blistering crasher crust noise. It's all nonstop, blasting d-beats, static guitar, barely audible rumbling bass and haunting distorted vocals echoing from your deepest nightmares. The always impressive drummer/vocalist combination is not wasted on these three tracks of no bullshit raw punk. "Psychedelic Apocalypse" and "The Last Goodbye" combined barely make the 2 minute mark, never overstaying their barely comprehensible onslaught of noise. The final track of decipherable music, a cover of DISCARDS "Death From Above" marginally improves the original if only by being exponentially deafening. Last but not least, "Outro" appears to be a wall of noise, reverb and delay cranked to ten thought experiment that doesn't stand out as anything groundbreaking but beats the cliché of some 60's burn out anti war audio sample or screams of a child, shell shocked from the horrors of war.

FFO: BLACK DOG, KOS, BLESS

Find the album released on Noise Itch Cassettes here:
<https://noiseitch.bandcamp.com/album/never-ending-shit-happens> Past releases/splits:
<https://visionsofchaos.bandcamp.com/>

TENAZ - "Demo 2024"

by Misery

From the cold, isolating depths of Montreal winter, TENAZ released a refreshing blast of dark anarcho-punk onto the scene. From the gloomy stomp of "Pelear Por Pelear" to the melodic riffs and vocal delivery of "No Entro", this six song demo packs a punch. No over the top distortion or effects on the guitar or bass gives every instrument a bit of room to breathe, and makes the combination of melodic singing, shouting and occasional haunting back up vocals even more opportunities for boot stomping and head bopping. The track "Normal?" almost breaks into a spoken word moment at the tail end of the song, just enough of a nod to the classics in this genre without overstaying its welcome. Expect catchy riffs, poignant vocal delivery and stalwart but never too busy drumming.

FFO: PARÁLISIS PERMANENTE, STRAW MAN ARMY, CHAIN CULT

Listen on bandcamp:

<https://tenaz.bandcamp.com/album/tenaz-demo>



VERIFY - "Hardcore Demo"

by Misery

Montreal based VERIFY once again combine the technical precision powerviolence is known for, pummeling hardcore breakdowns and relentless vocals boiling with contempt for those unwilling to take action in this 4 track demo. This is the first release from VERIFY to feature noise elements in song structure (credited to THE ARGUMENT), an excellent edition to this extremely tight outfit. Tracks "Sleepwalk" and "Drool" makes no illusions, if you spend your time with these songs you'll learn where the mosh parts are, and when it's time to lay back and be crushed by the noise. "Discrete Weapon" boils to the top with feed-back and discord, building up to a torrent of snare rolls and drum blasts that will make even the most humble of arm crossing punks move side to side in the pit. Rounding out the demo "Dirt" is a calculated, brutal near 3 minutes of fist clenching, gut churning sounds.

The meticulous musicianship is almost outmatched by the vocal delivery, punishing lyrics shouting at to those unwilling to assess the apathy of their inaction in the world, our internal struggle to shake our own faults of humanity and the inevitable reality that everything at the end will be reduced to nothing.

FFO: REGIONAL JUSTICE CENTER, NO FAITH, IRON LUNG

Find VERIFY's new demo and past releases at:
<https://www.likeweeds.org/verify/>
Contact: verifypvv@riseup.net

I'm really lucky to have access to a Risograph stencil duplicator, so that's how I print *La Chaîne*. It's really fast, the cost per impression is low, and it looks punk. I really love it.

I pay for the paper out of pocket, but it's not that bad — maybe \$10-15 per issue. If I didn't have the means to do it this way I would probably just do what I did to print zines when I was more broke and figure out a good copy scam. Over the winter I organized a new band show that was a fundraiser for the project — five brand new bands played and I did a special *La Chaîne* t-shirts, buttons and posters. It was a huge success and also a lot of fun, and I was able to net a bit of money for the project. I'll probably just try to do a benefit show like this once a year-ish to keep the project roughly sustainable, but even if I'm spending my own money to keep it going it feels worthwhile.

CONTENT

The first few months were a bit irregular, but now I basically put out an issue around the end of every month, which includes upcoming shows and events for the following month. The deadline for submissions and release date usually fluctuates a bit, but I pretty much just pick what I think is gonna be the biggest gig around the end of the month and use that as my release for the issue. I'm currently working on issue #19.



Front and back of issue #7 of *La Chaîne*, May 2023

Probably the biggest challenge is getting content. It's taken over a year to start getting a slow trickle of submissions, and even then it's still mostly my close friends and I still really have to hound people a lot. For anyone thinking about doing a submission-based project: don't assume people are gonna be pounding down your door to submit content, be fully prepared to do basically everything yourself or with a small dedicated group of friends. Some of my favourite larger features have been interviews or tour journals of local bands, but often an issue is composed of several smaller pieces like show reviews, lists, etc.

Montreal has a trilingual punk scene (English, French and Spanish), and *La Chaîne* is bilingual English/French. Most people here can read or speak French and English to at least some degree, so I encourage submissions in whatever language people feel comfortable writing in and rarely translate anything unless the author specifically requests it. The language mess is something I really love about Montreal, and I think having a chaotic, franglais newsletter makes the project feel super grounded here. Most submissions come in English, I think just because the people I feel close enough to to bug for submissions lean anglo these days. I would love more French submissions though, and I would probably print a submission in Spanish if I got one (although I'd have to get help reading/editing it).

DISTRIBUTION

I distribute *La Chaîne* somewhat haphazardly. I usually have copies of the latest issue at every show I go to, and I always leave some copies at the door or at my zine table if I'm tabling that show. Sometimes I walk around and ask my friends or people I recognize if they want a copy, and it's a nice excuse to make the rounds and say what's up to everyone. Sometimes I hand out copies as people are leaving. It really depends on how social I'm feeling that day (often not very social). Sometimes my very kind partner offers to hand them out. I was hoping that at some point people would figure out to ask me for the latest issue and I wouldn't have to have so much initiative, but it hasn't really happened yet. People usually respond pretty enthusiastically when I pull them out though.

A few months ago, I repainted an old newspaper box and put it in a central and publicly-accessible location in town. I keep it stocked with the latest issue, but so far only a small handful disappear from there each month. I'm hoping it will get more traffic now that it's about to be summer, and as people learn about it's location.

I print roughly 100 copies of each issue — if I print more than that I usually end up with extras and if I print less I usually run out, so that seems to be the sorta sweet spot for the scene at this moment.

CONTACT

The only web presence for *La Chaîne* is a publicly-viewable Mastodon account where I post little updates about when the next issue deadline is and where the new issue will be available. I upload the back issues to archive.org once they're a few months out of date — the idea being that if you want the newest issue you have to find a physical copy.

For submissions and correspondence, I have an email address set up, as well as a VoIP hotline phone number set up where people can hypothetically call or text. I am always kind of disappointed that more punks don't text or call the hotline — most of the voicemails I get are weird spam or wrong numbers.

ALLUSION – “Démon”

by Martin Force

A track from this demo was in a recent episode of *La Hora del Ruido* (Noise Not Borders Radio). I missed the live broadcast, but thankfully Boris specifically told me to check out this band because of my known interest in new drum-machine-driven punk and hardcore.

Démon opens (after a sample I can't place) with a drum machine d-beat, so it's going straight to my heart. The drums are loud and up-front as they should be. The vocals are delivered in shouted unintelligible French, possibly 50% just grunts and growls. It's great. The riffs are catchy and mostly fast, but often we'll get a sick and well-placed breakdown in the 3rd quarter of the track. I wouldn't do it any differently.

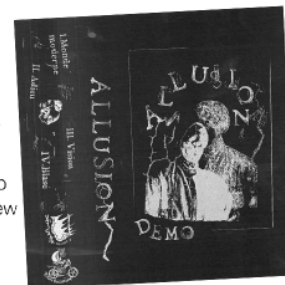
The B-side is a repeat of the A-side but produced with an alternate, more fucked up drum-machine, combining drum machine samples with “sons acoustiques” (acoustic sounds). I love the inclusion of this extra material.

This is certainly a demo, a two person recording project and some listeners might find the guitar especially a little under-produced. Personally the more I listen, the more I love it and I really hope we get a full-length from ALLUSION. I hope they'll follow their instincts to experiment demonstrated by the alternate takes and push the drum machines and fucked up sounds further in future releases.

FFO: STREET GLOVES, all the French drum-machine punk

Listen: <https://bitumerugueux.bandcamp.com/album/br008-allusion-d-mo>

Co-release by two French labels: Bitume Rugeux in Toulouse, and Urticaria Records in Nantes



WAFAQ – “Liberation Corpse”

by Misery

WAFAQ makes no illusions, this is brutal, blackened hard core punk inspired by past and ongoing acts of resistance around the world. This five track EP burns with a passion of those who rise from the ashes of devastation. Four anonymous members of this Indonesian outfit hit all the marks with some timely breakdowns, delayed guttural vocals, chainsaw distortion and an unwavering political statement. Boiling to the top from the first track, aptly named “Maniestol”, WAFAQ declares their all out attack on fascists regimes, ongoing colonialism, and the undying passion of those resisting oppression no matter how dire the circumstance. “Funeral Field” creeps up with a sludgy, doom drenched break down almost encompassing the whole song, accompanied by blown out, echoing guttural screams, that are briefly interrupted by ripping tempo change, as the band shouts “WAIT FOR REVENGE”.

Summed up perfectly by the band themselves.

“WAFAQ tells the story of the resistance of the people of Gaza against the Zionists and also tells the story of the internal conflicts of the community itself that claimed thousands of victims from fellow Palestinians themselves. This EP is dedicated to groups/individuals who are victims of prolonged conflict, deprivation of living space and oppression, and with the spirit of Intifada, WAFAQ invites us to continue to raise our voices and strengthen our ranks to be equally sensitive to what is happening now.”

FFO: 偏執症者 (PARANOID), HORRID, FRIGORA

Find the EP here: <https://wafaqnotforwar.bandcamp.com/album/liberation-corpse>



RECALL – “Demo 2024”

by Martin Force

RECALL is a new band from Montreal, featuring member of SPACERS, PEEVE, DEADBOLT and TOTAL NADA.

The demo opens with a slow plodding intro track with an almost spoke-word vocal delivery. It kinda lets you know you're in for some anarcho-vibes, at least politically speaking. After the intro the band kicks into the higher tempo d-beat that set the tone for the rest of the demo. There are still ample tempo changes and a few short breaks such that everything fits under their self-definition of “hardcore with d-beats”. We are even treated to a short side-to-side breakdowns at the end of “Recoil” and a few unpretentious guitar leads. RECALL is definitely a band to move to. The riffs are pretty scandy and pretty bouncy and none of them go on for too long, so you won't be bored. RECALL is neither generic d-beat nor generic USHC, the songwriting feels quite fresh and novel, and/or is pulling on some references that aren't being overplayed these days.

The lyrics are delivered with a snarl and cover a variety of frustrations with our capitalist world and its unending hunger for profit and extracted resources. Refreshing to see there's a clear political angle here. A nice treat on top of the solid songs.

RECALL has already played a few local shows in Montreal, and likely plans to play out of town in the fall.

Listen on their self-hosted website <https://recall.rock>
Self-released cassette
Contact: recall514punk@gmail.com



TERRITORY – “War For...?”

by Martin Force

TERRITORY is a new band of old people from Philly. Members of CURMUDGEON and DEATHRATS.

This demo-length cassette is crusty hardcore set to a mid-tempo d-beat, reminiscent of early 2000s political crust, but more hardcore and less melodic. Still, the influence of bands like HIS HERO IS GONE is evident in the under-60-second middle song “Suck The Marrow” or as I call it “The One With The Scissor Beats”. In the absence of more melodic parts, there are injections of short, at times otherworldly, guitar solos/leads which aren't exactly for me but do keep things interesting. I haven't seen them play, but I imagine the lead guitarist is playing a flying-V. If you like to rock you'll probably dig the leads.

The vocals are delivered in a dry deep growl and I don't have a lyric sheet, but song titles like “Microplastic Reality” and the general vibe of the band suggest strong political content, which is great. Proceeds from their Bandcamp sales are being donated to the para-cycling team turned mutual aid organization Gaza Sunbirds.

Buy the tape at their bandcamp, or from Sorry State Records. Listen on their bandcamp:
<https://territoryphl.bandcamp.com>

RASKOL – “Testimony” EP

by Martin Force

RASKOL was recommended to me by some friends as their “favorite band in Philly right now”. I describe this as “d-beatdown”: a backbone of pummeling d-beat with extremely tight and danceable side-to-side/2-step/slam parts. I'm all about sonic contrast, and this is one of my favorite combos. Too much non-stop d-beat and drawn out breakdowns alike get boring. Just hit me with tight assaults of both in equal measure. Are bands like this the pipeline for Hardcore kids getting into d-beat? I'm not sure but we need more of that too. NOSEBLEED from Richmond's 2017 EP was one of my top releases that year, and hearing this RASKOL EP is bringing me back to that record.

FFO: NOSEBLEED, TORSO

Released by Invisible Audio. Listen here:
<https://raskolphl.bandcamp.com/album/testimony-ep>

There used to be a show hotline phone number where you could call to get the weekly show listings, and I've thought about reviving that on the *La Chaîne* number, but haven't gotten around to it!

CONCLUSION

I plan to keep making *La Chaîne* for the foreseeable future. Maybe this comes through in the tone of my writing, but sometimes I do feel a bit ambivalent about it. I try not to let those feelings freak me out, because I know that at least once per issue, usually when I'm assembling everything together, I'll kinda step back and look at it and feel really proud of and excited about what I'm doing. That feeling is basically always worth pushing through any doubts.

In order to do something like this, you have to have a strong internal motivation – you really can't expect other people to care about it. But when someone does care, or when you hand a copy to a someone and it kind of blows their mind – it feels really fucking good. Meeting other fellow weirdos who do punk scene newsletters like this and trading papers is also one of my favorite things in the whole world. I hope this project keeps picking up steam and becoming a place where people in my scene can hype their projects and stay up on what's going on. And I hope that if someone in another place or time picks up a copy of *La Chaîne*, they'll be able to get a small taste of how cool and weird and special the DIY punk/hardcore scene in Montreal is right now. ☺



Do you do a local newsletter/zine/show calendar? Thinking of starting one? Tell us about it! <https://the-counterforce.org/contact-submit/>



ULTIMATE DISASTER – “Demo 2024”

by Hobbes

First things first: ULTIMATE DISASTER's demo is a refreshing blast of straightforward punishment, an antidote to my recent bout of math fatigue. Listening to their demo feels like breathing fresh air after being trapped in an elevator with a backlog of 2020s bands. All hell-bent on being the cleverest reinterpretation of d-beat.

ULTIMATE DISASTER understands that sometimes, the real challenge lies in executing something simple. Thankfully, they deliver exactly what I've been craving: an unrelenting, direct sound that feels like a much-needed slap in the face. The recording itself features very forward vocals, which certainly demand attention. While this style can be hit or miss, it works perfectly here, giving a sense of palpable anticipation, as if someone is right next to you, daring you to dive into the madness. Hesitate, and get pushed in. No one's waiting for you.



DESPERTÁ – S/T

by Vanislejay

DESPERTÁ is a punk band from Saint John's, Newfoundland. This release blends hardcore punk with post punk in a way that is way better than it sounds like it should be. Don't spot check this record, listen the whole thing cause it goes a lot of places, but it all works. Lots of songs have post punk intros that quickly transition into fist pounding hardcore that your downstairs neighbours will hate you for listening to. The lyrics are in Spanish which adds a great dynamic to this release from an isolated city. Don't sleep, pick this one up on cassette before they are gone and this band is huge.

REVIEWS

I'm consistently a big advocate for minimal lyrics. If you need a novel to convey your message in d-beat, you're doing it wrong. ULTIMATE DISASTER (to my amusement) surpasses even my expectations with a masterclass in brevity: "LBH" (Living Breathing Hell).

The recording is clear, and while I typically yearn for more dirt on a demo, we are thankfully still far from the sterile, linoleum-tiled, fluorescent lit d-beat recordings I've grown to dread. ULTIMATE DISASTER manages to keep it raw while prioritizing clarity.

This band doesn't pretend to be anything other than what it is, and I appreciate them for that. Another great band from Richmond, Virginia, serving as a testament to the relentless and motivating spirit of that scene. I'll definitely be keeping an eye out for future releases from Acute Noise Manufacture.

Released on Acute Noise Manufacture. Listen here: <https://ultimatedisasterbandcamp.com>

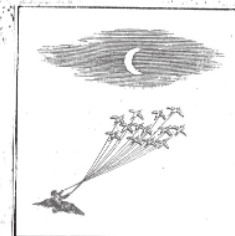
MEM//BRANE – “Subcutaneous” EP

by Vanislejay

This ep has been on heavy rotation since a friend posted it on our local punk mastodon instance a few months ago and I still just want to keep it looping into oblivion. Is this a perfect stenchcore release? Maybe there is too much hardcore mixed in for that label but that makes it even better IMO. At the end of the second track "Chain Breaker" there is a moment when you question if you are listening to a new IRON AGE record. "To Catch A Falling Knife" has maybe the hardest intro change into the first verse I've ever heard, and "Transgender Refugee" has a call back riff that makes you just wanna loop the entire thing. Four extremely solid tracks from this Seattle band. For fans of if HELLSHOCK and IRON AGE had a baby that was a very cool person.

FEELING FIGURES – “MIGRATION MAGIC”

by Corn



It was a cold November Saturday at the Van Horne underpass, people wandering back and forth across the train tracks as the sun was going down. Not a super attended show, the last one of the year and it felt like it. I know I'd seen them before in some loft, but in this context, scrappy and bittersweet, I felt like they were my favourite band in the city.

FEELING FIGURES' newest record is a perfect meal for those of us who grew up with SHOP ASSISTANTS and TIGER TRAP on rotation with the more hardcore fare. The more punchy and hook-filled tracks like "Dream Death" and "Movement" (both with charming music videos, always nice to see) are bridged with gentle and melancholy songs like "I Should Tell You" and "Seek and Hide" (my personal favourite). But most importantly for twee pop, the drummer isn't afraid to play FAST when the song calls for it! When there's no fast: songs this stuff is usually boring!

This album comes out on K Records, which is extremely cool to people like me who once tried to wear corduroy pants in the middle of summer, but I want to specifically shout out bassist Joe Chamandy's record label Celluloid Lunch, definitely not the last time I write about stuff he's got cooking.

Available from K Records. Listen here: <https://feelingfigures.bandcamp.com/album/migration-magic>
Celluloid Lunch: <https://www.celluloidlunch.com/>



PUFFER – S/T EP

by Corn



Montreal has a legendarily wet, cold and irritating winter, which people sometimes cite as the reason this city has such a wild scene come summer. People spend 5 months in shotgun apartments and cramped jamspaces, then emerge with some extremely fresh shit. When PUFFER came out of the even longer sequester of the COVID lockdowns, it felt like a tri-plex exploding.

Comprised of core members from the already canonical ULTRARAT and the massively underrated F.I.T.S., PUFFER comes through with a sound as punk as a torn GBH shirt and as rock'n'roll as blue jeans, with shows that have stayed just as exciting as when I first saw them in an abandoned railway. Quick flourishes like the backing vocals and speeding-truck guitar runs improve the rock-solid song structures, my favourite track would be the bouncy street-rocker "Sister Marie", but hey, it's a 4 song EP, they're all good.

FFO: SLAUGHTER AND THE DOGS, GIRLSCHOOL, bands that are specifically described as 'punk rock'

Available on RoachLeg Records, NYC. Listen here: <https://roachlegrecords.bandcamp.com/album/puffer-s-t-ep>
Related, ULTRARAT: <https://ultrarate.bandcamp.com>
F.I.T.S.: <https://thisisthewrongway.bandcamp.com/>

SIYAHKAL – “Live At The Monarch April 29, 2023”

by Vanislejay

SIYAHKAL is a raging Toronto hardcore punk band who sing in a dialect of Farsi. This tape is absolutely ripping, and is a pretty unreal recording for a live set. It opens with a maniacal laugh that sets the stage well for the next few minutes of making you stomp around wherever you are listening to it. The tape layout is photocopied on cardstock, and equally foreshadows how hard this tape is. For fans of brutal plodding hardcore like DESTINO FINALE.

Listen here: <https://serpentgallery.bandcamp.com/album/sg-01-siyahkal-live-at-the-monarch>
Tape available from Serpents Gallery Recordings